

SUBJECTS

The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night

"If blood is going to be shed, we're going to let it run down Columbia Road — all kinds. We are not going to send Negro blood down Columbia all by itself." The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night

THERE usually is a touch of ceremony in a cross-burning by the Ku Klux Klan. A carload of Klansmen drives into a Negro neighborhood and selects a lawn, gets out and plants the cross in the dirt, sets it afire and then drives away in solemn satisfaction.

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BYLINE

By ROY REED

PUBLISH DATE

August 15, 1965

PAGE NUMBERS

97, 254, 260, 262, 264

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A selective product of the GREAT LAKES MINK ASSOCIATION producers of natural dark ranch mink. HAT BY ANROSE



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Southern Negroes—like the predominantly Northern Black Muslims before them—have set out in a new direction. They are determined to prove to the white racists, and perhaps to themselves, that the Negro not only can take it but that he also can dish it out.

Dr. Pettigrew believes that the emergence of the Deacons is a sign of improving mental health among Negroes. Now, at last, Negroes can swallow their fears and talk openly of guns and organized defense.

"In a funny way," he says, "that's progress."

WATCHING the Deacons in Louisiana, one is struck repeatedly by the pride they inspire among Negroes. It is a racial pride, and the Deacons are not above racist demagoguery and preaching contempt for all whites. But, whatever their flaws, the Deacons have proved to be a natural instrument for building community feeling and nourishing the Negro identity.

Dr. Pettigrew has pointed out in his lectures and writings that the members of an oppressed minority have three ways of dealing with their oppression: (1) they can move toward the oppressor and seek equality with him, as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Congress of Racial Equality have encouraged the American Negro to do; (2) they can seclude themselves and try to avoid contact with the oppressor, as was common in the old-time segregated South; (3) they can move against the oppressor and fight him.

The Deacons have chosen the third way. While they officially advocate hitting only in retaliation, there is in their attitude an unmistakable appreciation of weapons and the prospect of using them on the white devil. It is easy to see how an oppressed community would rally around this noble belligerence.

Another part of the Deacons' appeal may be in what Mexicans call *machismo*, the brash assertion of masculinity. Dr. Stephen E. Salenger of Los Angeles, a resident in psychiatry who spent several days last month in Jonesboro as a member of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, said in an interview there that he believed that the white segregationist's reason for calling a Negro man "boy" was to show his disrespect and to "desex" the Negro adult male, or at least to deny that he was concerned with the Negro as a sexual or violent threat to the white man's supremacy. To combat this libel, he said, the Deacon openly flaunts a favorite phallic symbol—the gun—just as the Klansman does, thus asserting at one time his own sexual competence and his contempt for the white man's opinion. All this subconscious, of course.

Whatever the psychological and sociological underpinnings, it is evident that the Deacons are well on their way to community leadership in the towns where they have become established. Deacons already are the top Negro leaders in Bogalusa and Jonesboro.

Charlie Sims, the 42-year-old leader of the Bogalusa Deacons, is a good example of the new, nonmiddle-class Negro leader in the Southern civil-rights movement. Of the top three Negro leaders in Bogalusa—all of whom are Deacons—he probably is the most popular.

Mr. Sims is a part-time insurance salesman with a pre-civil-rights police record including such offenses as assault and carrying a concealed weapon. In other times he would have been simply a tough; now he is a hero. Negro teenagers swarm around him and run his errands. Women look up to him. Even white civil-rights workers honorize him. A white civil-rights lawyer said admiringly in his presence the other day, "One man I wouldn't want mad at me is Charlie Sims."

Mr. Sims, a stocky, graying man who seldom smiles, responds predictably. He mixes a point of calling white reporters by their first names, not in friendliness but in condescension. He approached the well-known Negro author, Louis Lomax, after a mass meeting one night and, to let the author know that he was ready to escort him to his room, growled in the tone of an order, "Let's go, Louis."

Mr. Sims carries a pistol in his hip pocket. If the lump causes him discomfort when he sits down, he simply pulls the pistol out and tosses it like a package of cigarettes onto the nearest table. He has done this several times in a room full of people, unnerving the faint-hearted and enhancing his reputation as a hell of a fellow.

ONE of the Deacons' ablest spokesmen is the executive secretary of the parent chapter at Jonesboro. He is a 21-year-old football coach, biology teacher and part-time minister named Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick. He stands 6 feet 3 inches, weighs 260 pounds and believes "there are only two ways to do things; that's right and wrong."

He also believes in direct action. When a white landlord refused to install indoor plumbing in his Negro houses, Mr. Kirkpatrick led a group of young men and high school students last spring in a privy-burning campaign. They burned 40 outhouses before they finished and that became the Deacons' first civic project. The landlord put in bathrooms. However, he refused to install sewer lines, and the

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